THE MEASURE
A JOURNAL OF POETRY

Turbine and Dynamo Poems, by MacKnight Black

***Hamlet - Poet or Novelist?*- - - - - - - -**

An Open Letter to Poets- - - - - - - - - - - - - .

$2.50 by the Year- - - - - - - - - - -Single Copies 25c

Editorial Office- - - -223 West 15th Street, New York, N. Y.

Published Monthly- - - - - - - - - - - - Cornwall, N. Y.

Number 59 - - - - - - - - - - - - - January, 1926

Entered as second-class matter February 4, 1924, at the post office at Cornwall, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1876

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City Eyes

THE arc of a turbine-wheel
Flows like a curved rush of swallows, come over a hill;
Its thrust is a dream of wet haunches of bullocks
Dragging plows through stiff earth;
Its down-stroke is brilliant with scythes
That have jewelled the hot bosoms of grainlands.

Things lost come again in sudden new beauty.
Look long on a turbine. It is sweet to the eyes.

New Mother

DYNAMOS are bosoms,
Round with the sweet first-filling of a new mother's milk.
The lowlands have fostered enough of sons, and the hills, and the sea.
Now a strange mother with nipples of iron gives suck to a nation.
At her side the young towns take strength on their lips.

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Stark

STARK as a new-cooled earth,
The turbine spins,
Remote.
This naked son
Of bloodless splendor
Is awful as a peak
In Tierra del Fuego—
As well it cries
How worlds were whole in matter
First,
And no brain drew a sheath
About the ancient, bitter swords
Of their intent.

Stark as a new-cooled earth,
The turbine spins,
Remote.

Lightnings

LIGHTNINGS
Carve the wide sky,
Squirm like pale snakes
Into the hot earth.

Thunderbolts
Hidden in clouds of dynamos
Are tapped slowly
For a nation's toil.

Grim strength,
Drunk or sober.

Turbine

TORMENT of matter
Brought to beauty
Carved in moving steel—
Hunger
Of tiger loins, of lightnings—
Man absolute
Compacted in a wheel!

Turbine at High Speed

THIS is my body, unbroken and clean.
This is my breast, unbound.
My loins are fulfilled in this steel.

Now, Death . . . what things shall be destroyed?
Not this—
Most naked splendor of my limbs and breath—
This one spear
That breaks Time's curtain and escapes
Your rust.

Machine-Strength

NO wheel turns
But with the petal-building throb of violets;
No steel circle
Moves but in separate hunger, like a heart.
Machine-strength leaps
Like bloom across a Spring—
Like flesh, as desperate and bright!

Turbine Heart

BARE as the lightning, bare is my heart.
Since I looked on a turbine,
I can see my bare heart.
Its hunger is driven
As by steam in the frenzy
That hounds a white wheel;
Its pulse and the fire-haunted
Pulse of the turbine
Are one in deep toil;
Until from my heart and out of the steel
Something is lifted
In a blaze of dark wings,
In a flight.

Machine-Born

IN a humble place
The virgin steel
Gives birth to a son of god.
The mystic body of a Christ of power
Is come to earth—
And finds no worshippers
Or star.

MacKnight Black

Buried Cities

IN cities buried underneath the loam,
Like subterranean crypts of ancient Rome,
People exist in many a catacomb.
Dim galleries of streets that stumble there
Are excavated out of solid air.
Philosophers crawl bewildered in the maze
Of tunnelled, labyrinthine passageways.
They scratch at rock-hewn walls which but rejoice
To flaunt back echoes with derisive voice;
Philosophers with their torches merely find
Their tapers but ensoot at last the mind;
And in these sepulchres, are only giving
A weird phantasmagoria to living.

Each house, a dim sarcophagus or pen,
Holds mummies that imagine they are men;
For in these hidden quarries, mummies mould,
Interred in flesh-like bandage, fold on fold;
And in their superstitions tightly bound,
With cerements of codes are wrapped around.
Thus, tier on tier, sarcophagi and tombs
With hieroglyphs proclaim unnumbered dooms:
What vanities and lusts are heaped in graves
Within these buried walls, where nothing saves!

The shrouded,dark, and tunnelled avenues
Go snaking past and the strange and gloomy views
Of spires—those obelisks that tower
Like tall stalactites, frozen for an hour.
The malady of civilization oozes
Excrescences of cities. . . . (These are bruises
Erupting from earth.) So funguses of brick
And moulds of mortar, too, are teeming thick.
For, as in dungeons, clammy growths are fed,
So blanched, rank toadstools of the buildings spread
Streets of these buried cities of the dead.

After long years, what Gods will dig in grime,
Unearthing cities buried under Time,—
Will find, when out of earth's hard, granite air,
Old, long-embalmed, forgotten races there? . . .

Rush Hour

(To M. B.)

BEHOLD how Life arranges madness: see
How well it mimics dreams of sanity:
It organizes bedlam; sorts confusion;
And makes the mobs to traffic with illusion.
The rabble with its ritual of strife
Does painful penance for the sin of life.
The corners boil with crowds; the corners foam
With masses being threshed into the loam
(Although they rarely spy—the thoughts would stab—
How every flagstone's like a graveyard-slab!)
And while their city's stone must have its say
In foolish, losing parley with decay,
Whom should these huddled rushing mobs condemn,
As Time is leisurely unfleshing them?—
Whom should they blame for baiting to confusion
Their beaten bodies, bandaging illusion?

Louis Ginsberg

If Scars Are Worth the Keeping

STEEL, hard to dent, once dented
Is history of blows
That, by the rust augmented,
Barren resistance shows—
And that is all one knows.

O heart I thought to harden
To steel to bear the blow,
You grew more like a garden
Time walks and the winds sow—
And seasons come and go.

The sod, where heels were twisted,
Springs back at last in rain.
Spots, sometimes flower-misted,
Some prone earth-pressing pain
First crushed where it had lain.

If scars are worth the keeping
The steel is rich indeed—
O heart, this wistful reaping
Of restless waiting seed
That flowers where you bleed!

Mountains

THROUGH molten chaos burning back its shores
Flame-drowning earth-gods heaved their writhing shoulders
And pushed into the swirl of meteors
The heights of earth impregnable with boulders.
And flinted ledges sheer against the vast
Caught up the dust of stars that struck and crumbled,
Till all the hissing seas burned out at last
And from cooled skies the silver cataracts tumbled.

Each Age has worn to levels of the sand
The hovels and the towers of the plain.
The troubled ant-hills—then the brushing Hand!
The gold-dust palace—then the pounding Rain!
Only survive the mountains, after all—
And dreams that spoke above the crumbling wall!

Glenn Ward Dresbach

Time is A Spade

TIME is a spade. The urge of light comes tapping
And knocking on the door of silent earth,
Time zooks its spade and up you come to birth;
The going air and sky your body's trapping.
Out against blue space you burst and are
Consummate part with wind and blowing bird;
Whittling your shrill desire to a word;
Fumble and stumble upward toward a star.

With clay on your feet and the oozy suck
Of rivers through your veins you writhe and creep
Miasmic through strong light, clutching to pluck
The star your earthy fingers cannot keep;
Till, tap-tapping of the urge you cannot ken,
Time zooks its spade and under you go again.

Reading Epitaphs

RECEDING sun aslant these stones
Bids me lean down and read thereon,
In half-incredulous monotones,
The epitaphs of rustics gone.

If sun can mark so pointedly
These sleepers who outdid its span,
I wonder if as ardently
I could not point the sun to man?

But that would be my pride again;
And since the sun comes back at will
Of its appointment, but not men,
I can but read here and be still.

And see if reading I may learn
The truth time leaves in a cycle's turn;
Only to find myself at loss
With words that are covered up by moss.

Howard McKinley Corning

Remembered Farm

THERE was a line of frosty light
Along each roof and down the road.
All the rest was perfect night;
Not a field or window showed.

In my cool thought no morning came
To sweep the hills, no moon arose
To flood the meadows with its flame
As far as all this valley flows.

Now I am come, the fields are fair.
Yet not the greenest flesh atones
For when the skeleton was bare
And lightning ran along the bones.

Inference

WHO made the evening made the fear
Of horse and bird and snake and deer;
Of all that do not know they live
Till light itself, grown fugitive,
Comes breathing by—but turns about,
And the black pouncer puts it out.
Then bird and horse and deer and snake
Go posting home, before they break
The line that leads them; and their eyes
Hold all the day that slowly dies.

Mark Van Doren

The Measure ❧ *A Journal of Poetry*

Published monthly by the Editors at 223 West 15th St., New York

Edited by Léonie Adams, Joseph Auslander, Louise Bogan, Padraic Colum, Rolfe Humphries, George O'Neil, E. Merrill Root, Pitts Sanborn, Genevieve Taggard. From these nine an active editor is elected quarterly.

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Hamlet, or the Artist's Defeat

THE curtain rises to show us the Eternal Spectator with a black tuxedo coat and a cigarette case. Hamlet, the most impractical man in modern life, confronted with the business-like task of avenging a murder, maunders through three or four months of extraordinary epigrams, and finally ends up in such a mess that he kills not merely the major criminal, but himself, his charge, and three or four innocent persons as well.

Now, the interesting thing about this Hamlet is, that when he wishes to, he can be more practical than any one else in the entire realm of Denmark. He ferrets out the secret of a murder suspected by no one else, he fools a king into self-betrayal before his court; he, in his own words, when in the hands of spies—hoists the engineer with his own petard, delves one yard below their mines and blows them at the moon.

What is the matter with this man who walks unharmed through dangers that would defeat twelve excellently level-headed Horatios, and yet cannot go through the simple process of pulling a trigger at a kneeling enemy's head? Well, the trouble with him is very simple—he is not really concerned in playing that game. If his cousin

Macbeth, the careerist, is deceived into thinking himself a candidate for the kingdoms of this world, Hamlet never for an instant entertains any such irrelevant interests. At the moment of his discovery of the crime, he is chiefly engaged in noting down for his forthcoming play or novel that a man may smile and smile and be a villain; and even his eloquence to his mother smacks more of the imaginative writer of fiction than of the dutiful son.

For Hamlet, as I think I am not the first to point out, is a modern novel, and about a modern novelist as well. I find in it little of the blind-eyed ecstacy of the poet; Hamlet is crippled not because he is looking inward upon his own emotions, but because he sees every one's emotions but his own. In a world of go-getters, he alone is not partisan. That poor worried King—if not a model brother at least a model husband and ruler of a state—and that excellent Queen, are behaving, with due allowance for the quaint customs of the time, only as all normal, properly regulated people always behave. One could go on house-parties with them, and find them pleasant and appropriate guests—one could marry either of them, and be sure of getting a reasonably faithful and congenial spouse. But one could not marry Hamlet, whose tergiversations would drive any sweetheart mad—and Hamlet on a house-party would doubtless disrupt international relations forever by calling President Coolidge a capital calf.

But if Hamlet plays a disastrous role in Danish court circles, he solves the problem with his customary penetration by blaming the casting director rather than himself. The times being out of joint, it was worse than spiteful to have him born to set them right; setting them right is none of his business. His business is to walk through scenes of farce or melodrama, uttering comments of perfect obviousness and disinterestedness, deriding even his avatar the ghost, sympathizing even with his enemy the king—and expressing the whole in quotations of such unparalleled sweetness and precision that they have been handed down from generation to generation as our sole imperishable witness of that futile court of Denmark.

Robert Wolf

Shaking No Fist

(The Long Gallery, by Anne Goodwin Winslow. Harcourt, Brace and Co.)

IT is a pleasure to find again these quiet poems so many of which appeared in the glamorous *Freeman*. They are in a delicately patterned mood that shakes no fist at heaven, a mood difficult to render in unhackneyed form. But Mrs. Winslow achieves distinction. With the most economical materials she can impale much lengthy exposition on a finely simple line: in

"Love is a cup where all their lips have been,"

sum up each new human being longing for one untarnished moment; or make contrast with our fraying grasp upon experience with

"His perfect leaf falls with the perfect year."

The book records much that is not primarily poetry, but excursions into literature, especially Greek literature, that have served, it is evident, as carefully chosen padding for life, and serve now similarly in this book of verses. It is often in her slightest verses that Mrs. Winslow's quality is clearest; such poems as *"The Ladies"* and *"The Outdoor Theater"* have a light and practised touch that is an artistry of its own. They are not so characteristic of her work, however, as this fine and simple sonnet:

"As a king, hot with hunting, snatches up
An offered goblet holding any wine,
And drinks and rides and leaves the common cup
A thing its owner shall henceforth enshrine,
So have you left my life; an idle glass
It stands now carefully upon its stem
Among things precious, or the ones that pass
For precious to me since I reverence them.
Earth makes its treasures out of such as this;
One cannot bear to break or throw away
Its useless cups, its empty chalices;
And even the grail that holy pilgrims kiss
But held the vintage of a thirsty day
To one rare moment's apotheosis."

Anne Singleton

A Letter to Contributors - and Other Poets

THE MEASURE has nearly finished its fifth year. During that time we have made, we think a substantial record of achievement. . . . We have printed poems by most, if not all, the leading American poets. . . . We have been the means of introduction for others. . . . We are constantly receiving requests for back numbers containing this or that prose article. . . . *The Measure's* value is recognized by many college and university libraries. . . . Editorial work has not dulled the creative power of the staff; during this half-decade, *Measure* editors have published fifteen volumes of verse, not to mention the making of anthologies, novels, short stories, criticism, and drama.

There is little doubt but that we could continue indefinitely at our present rate. We do not believe in doing so. Unless *The Measure* can become a far better magazine, we prefer to wind up our affairs, and refuse to let impulse degenerate into habit.

Our most definite and constructive suggestion for improvement is the payment of poets. During prosperous intervals in the past, poets have at times been paid; that has never been a consistently maintained policy of the magazine. We believe that it should be. If our subscription list could be enlarged and extended to cover the current expenses of the magazine, it could be. Under such circumstances, the money we now receive from guarantors and patrons, money which is used to balance accounts and keep the wolf from the door, could be used to reward poets. Even a small surplus would enable us to establish prizes; a generous one would give us the opportunity to pay our poets regular space rates.

Don't you agree that this would help both *The Measure* and its contributors alike?

On this basis we are appealing to our guarantors to continue their generosity and add to it if possible. They have helped us nobly in the past. From those who have helped us with contributions we dare not ask much; we know too well that poets usually have little money,—and if we had to choose between their money and their life, we would prefer—their poems.

But one subscription?

With best wishes, and appreciation,

Yours,
THE MEASURE.

Notes and Comment

ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS for poetical genius!

In avowed search for poetic writing having in it at least the elements of greatness and high beauty, whatever may be its unadaptability to immediate and commercial publication, Walter Clare Martin, Kansas editor and poet, has announced the institution of a scheme intended to bring to light some now unrecognized genius. To this genius the organizer of the offer promises a prize of $1,000.

This is not a contest, but a search; an attempt to locate some Immortal who is in danger of passing from birth to death with his mouth full of contemporary dust and ashes. . . . As this is a search for Genius, in the most incandescent sense, the award *will not* be made unless some work appears bearing the mark and glow of immortality—the elemental greatness to stand it off from the swarms of literary fowl that flutter to the daily news stand. . . . The search will continue to January 1, 1927, unless a "great unknown" is uncovered before that time. . . . Scripts should be mailed to Walter Clare Martin, box 8, Vandeveer Park station, Brooklyn, N. Y. . . . The work submitted may be in prose or verse, one word or a thousand. If a work runs more than 1,000 words, only an excerpt should be sent. If this is superior, the whole script will be asked for. No scripts can be returned. Keep duplicates. Authors retain all rights, except that he may quote from their scripts in writing articles about the progress of the search. This is to be clearly understood. Previous publication is no handicap, un-

less the author has become well known or wealthy. The work of a wealthy genius would be acknowledged great, but the award would not be given or would be given to some other contributor, likewise a genius.

The Measure's interest in this search is, frankly, tinged with skepticism. We dare say we have already perused many of the manuscripts which will be sent Mr. Martin; our own hunt, so much more tiny, has been unrewarded. Perhaps we have been too modest and too cheap. Accordingly, we are announcing *that we will double any prize Mr. Martin offers for the appearance of incandescent Genius between now and January 1, 1927.* We shall, of course, be our own judges; we have, of course, no $2,000: nevertheless, we are confident in the ultimate outcome.

* * * * * * *

THE judges of the Poetry Society of America's Undergraduate Contest, Sara Teasdale, George Sterling and the donor, announce that the Bynner Prize of $150 is unanimously awarded to Countee Cullen (New York University) and that Honorable Mention is given, in the following order of preference, to

George Dillon (University of Chicago; Roberta Swarts (Mount Holyoke College); Tom Freeman (Ohio Northern University); Marshall V. Howe (Columbia University); Helene P. Basquin (Smith College); William Cunningham (University of Oklahoma); Edith Horton (Cornell University); Eunice Gailey (Willamette University); Kathryn Kelley (Cornell University); Elizabeth Whitney (Mount Holyoke College); Sue Grundy Bonner (University of Michigan); Joyce Mayhew (Mills College); Sally Linley (Smith College); Lucius Beebe (Harvard University); Marian J. Keiley (Smith College); Isaac Wade (Southern Methodist University); Frank Mitvalsky (University of Arizona); Constance Hirschy (Smith College) and Dorothy Lester (Mount Holyoke College).

Countee Cullen, who holds first place this year, held second in both 1923 and 1924; Roberta Swartz, third this year, was fourth in 1923 and fifth in 1924; and Tom Freeman, fourth this year, was seventh in 1924. The others are all newcomers to the honor list.

There were over 600 entries in the contest, representing 71 universities and colleges in 30 states.

For 1926, Mr. Bynner, whose co-judges will be Rose O'Neill and Vachel Lindsay, offers the $150 prize under the auspices of PALMS, of which he is an associate editor. An interesting and generous addition is made to the prize by His Excellency Jose G. Zuno, Governor of Jalisco, who offers the winner free fare from the American border to Guadalajara, Mexico, where PALMS is published, and a term of free tuition in the University of Guadalajara.

Except for the fact that poems previously published will no longer be eligible in the contest and that the award carries with it publication in PALMS, terms of the contest will continue virtually as in other years. Only undergraduates in an American college or university may compete. Whether the offering be a single poem or a group of poems, not more than two hundred lines will be considered from any one poet. Manuscripts should be typewritten in triplicate, should bear on every sheet the writer's name, address and college, and must be mailed by March 31, 1926, to Witter Bynner, Box 1061, Santa Fe, New Mexico. The envelope should be marked: P. C. No manuscripts will be returned.

CONTRIBUTORS

MacKnight Black writes his machine-age lyrics in Philadelphia. He is a frequent contributor to current periodicals.

Louis Ginsberg, of Newark, is a poet well-known to readers of *The Measure.*

Glenn Ward Dresbach, author of *The Enchanted Mesa,* is now a resident in Chicago.

Howard McKinley Corning sent these poems from Portland, Oregon.

Mark Van Doren is author of *Spring Thunder,* and literary editor of *The Nation.*

Anne Singleton has previously given *The Measure* lyric poetry.

Robert Wolf, author of *After Disillusion,* offers us this interpretation of Hamlet partly in consequence of Calvin Austin's *Candida,* published last February. *The Measure* will be glad to consider additional essays in similar vein.

The Measure

A Journal of Poetry

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Publication Office at Cornwall, N. Y.

Editorial Office at 223 West Fifteenth Street, New York City

Subscription $2.50 a year *Single Copies 25 cents*

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